
BEACON 28TH MARCH 2020



ENFORCED SABBATH

“There remains, then a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

For whoever enters Gods rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His”

Hebrews 4 v 9

I know the situation is serious. I know people are really struggling. Some are in terrible suffering. But this morning, I couldn't help enjoying the lockdown. A leisurely time with God – nice early morning coffee, no need to keep one eye on the clock. Then – in accordance with government guidelines, and at the insistence of a small dog impatient to get outdoors – a long walk in Woodbank park. O the joy of it! Early spring. The pale sun cutting through the bare branches of the trees. Here and there, the bright green of the first leaves. Quiet. No traffic. No planes. Not even a child's voice. But there is sound – geese noisily taking flight, the sense (am I imagining it?) of a birds wings beating the air. A cow lows softly from a nearby farm. The river, fast flowing, full of life – and rivulets of water constantly flowing down into it.

I am less than a mile from the centre of Stockport – but, press pause, and the peace is tangible.

Since the first days of the Virus, I've felt as if God is saying “press the reset button”. You know how it is – if you have an old computer, it very easily seems to get tangled up in itself, the little buffering circle going round and round. The computer seems ever so busy – but achieving nothing. There's nothing for it but to press the reset button. Switch off; let it all calm down for a time. And then – when you switch back on – miraculously, everything is restored, order reigns. And you can get back to work.

So, what is God saying about the Reset button? It made me think about Sabbath. Not Sunday, just Sabbath. That special time when we are meant to switch off, put work aside, and rest with God.

Think about the work of creation – those first intriguing chapters of the Bible. God has a plan. An orderly plan. He says “let there be light” – and there it is. Light.

He makes the sky, He separates earth and from water, makes trees and plants and wonderful fruit. He speaks, and moon and sun and stars and planets appear. The water teems with living creatures, and every kind of animal begins to move on the ground. And God said it was good – so good.

“let there be light”

But amidst all these wonders He longed for a creature to be His very own. One like Him, made in His own image. One He could fellowship with - talk with, share with, spend time with. And so, He made a Man – Adam, and a Woman, Eve.

And this He felt was very, very good.

So, what happened next. Well, obviously, God has a plan. He wanted Adam to fill the earth and subdue it. He wanted him to be fruitful and multiply. He wanted Him to rule over every living thing.

So God said “Come on Adam. Get busy. Lots to do. Let’s set some goals, make a To Do list and get on with it.....”?

No. Adam’s first day of life was the Sabbath.

The bible says **“By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done”**.

What? Rest? God wasn’t tired – He’s God, who never slumbers or sleeps. Adam wasn’t tired – he hadn’t done anything yet! In all honesty – in my opinion, he hadn’t earned a rest.

So I can only conclude that God just wanted to spend His first day with Adam, uninterrupted, just spending time with him. You can imagine them stretching, leaning back on a comfortable tree, and just chilling out for a few hours. Maybe Adam snoozed a little. Maybe they just sat and watched the animals go by. I’m sure they chatted, and got to know each other’s deepest thoughts. Only then could Adam really understand Gods heart, and what He really meant by His plan – not just the tasks that were needed, but the heart behind it.

“Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done”

And so a rhythm was set up – 6 days to work (although it seems they knew when to stop – they strolled in the cool of the evening each day), and one day to enjoy total rest together.

Of course, Adam and Eve couldn’t stick to it. It wasn’t long before they had broken friendship with God – they couldn’t obey God, they just thought they knew better. And work became - no longer a pleasure – but painful toil, requiring sweat and tears to wrest a living from the earth. And surely – with it being so hard to get fruit from the earth, a bit MORE work must surely result in a better harvest. So little by little, it probably became more work, and even less rest.

Well, you know the story as well as I do. Gods beloved people were soon slaves in Egypt – all work, and no rest. Eventually God rescued them. He took them into the wilderness. And still Gods desire was Sabbath. He enshrined it in the Law of Moses – with severe penalties for ignoring it. It didn't work – in fact, it became yet MORE work to do, complex rules of what did and did not constitute Sabbath.

Was this really what God had in mind? All He really wanted was for Man to switch off, put the work aside, and spend time with Him.

Why is it so very difficult to do? Sadly, for many, there's no option but to work long hours, just to pay the bills. But apart from that – we still seem to keep running, all the time. What would happen if we dared to stop our activity? Once we get past the busyness – what might we find? Is that what we are running away from? The pain, the frustration, the buried anxiety. The family members who get on our nerves. The hobbies – sometimes a pleasure, sometimes a frantic distraction from the disquiet within.

But if we can stick with it – and let the whirling thoughts and feelings run their course – press the off switch – there it is. Underneath it all - the still small Voice we've been longing to hear. The Voice that says, "well done", "don't be afraid", "trust me". The Voice that says, "I know your pain – it will be OK". The Voice that says,

" I loved you before you ever did a single thing – now rest"

So here we are. Sabbath – for days on end. Some of us – soon maybe all of us – forced to stay home. No work. Minimal shopping. Enforced rest.

Be still. Enjoy your hobbies. Take a nap. Read. Sit in the garden. Bake a cake. Do whatever restores your soul.

But do it – as if God is sitting with you, keeping you company. Do it from rest. He's with you – just as surely as He was with Adam.

PRAYER: Lord God – I pray that today we would find your quiet Voice in the place of rest. Amen

Song "Be still my soul" Selah



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